

Position Description

General Overview

Responsible for engaging with peers to develop their understanding of mental health issues and resilience; recognizing peers experiencing mental health stressors and crises, and navigating them to the right services for help; and supporting the development of a culture of mental health resilience and emotional wellness in the agency.

Responsibilities

- Work with EMS management to develop and implement an employee education program that discusses the mental health issues
 faced by the EMS workforce, the impact of stress and trauma on EMS personnel, and strategies and practices to strengthen EMS
 practitioners' personal resilience.
- Engage with peers experiencing mental health stressors and crises.
 - Assist them in developing personalized crisis support plans.
 - Identify formal and informal emotional supports for EMS personnel.
 - Discuss services that they may want to utilize for help.
 - As needed, navigate them to these services.
 - Support the development of a culture of mental health resilience and emotional wellness in the agency.
 - Identify mental health resilience resources, both locally and nationally, and share this information with agency personnel.
 - Recognize current organizational culture related to mental health resilience.
 - Work with EMS management to identify and address systemic impediments to a resilient workforce and develop policies that support resilience.
- Keep up to date on the latest best practices to support EMS practitioner resilience.
- Promote agency personnel wellness initiatives.
- Obtain feedback from colleagues on all resilience activities within the agency.

Qualifications

- interest in serving in this position
- experienced EMS practitioners, with at least 3 years of field experience
- strong interpersonal communications skills
- well respected within the agency
- prior experience with critical incident stress debriefing, peer-to-peer support programs, and/or motivational interviewing desired



The Stress Response, Step by Step

Step 1

A message is relayed to the central nervous system from the body's sensory organs. These nerve messages travel to both the "thinking brain" and the "emotional brain."

Step 2

If the amygdala senses a threat, it immediately sends a message to the body to react. This happens at an automatic and unconscious level, like the startle reflex to a loud noise. It is important to remember that we react first and think second when faced with a potential threat.

Step 3

The thinking brain assesses the situation to determine whether the danger is real or a false alarm.

Step 4

If the cortex confirms the threat is real, it triggers the amygdala to engage the "fight or flight" response. Hormones are rapidly released, resulting in an increased ability to respond to the stressor. In some instances, when the amygdala and cortex are unable to determine an immediate response, the brain may essentially cease processing or reacting to external stimuli, resulting in what is known as "freezing."

Step 5

Once the cortex recognizes that the threat has passed, it stops releasing stress hormones and provides feedback to the amygdala that reduces its ability to support a stress reaction within the body further.



Stress Continuum

Thriving	Surviving	Struggling	Crisis
 regular use of coping skills during stress optimal functioning Features in control calm and steady getting the job done reliable playing sense of humor physically healthy sleeping enough emotionally available 	Definition mild or temporary distress and loss of function Types personal and work stress acute or critical incident stress compassion fatigue Features worried irritable, angry cutting corners sleep loss poor focus avoidance criticism social isolation	Definition moderate/persistent distress moderate impairment in multiple areas Types trauma (vicarious or direct) compassion fatigue grief exhaustion moral injury Features loss of control can't sleep or sleeps all the time panic/rage apathy guilt/shame relationships suffering somatic complaints	Definition severe distress serious impairment behavioral health diagnosis Types PTSD (secondary or direct) anxiety depression substance overuse Features thoughts of suicide hopelessness/helplessness broken relationships feeling lost chronic somatic complaints
Self-Care/Resilience	Resolves with self-care/Peer support/Chaplain/EAP	Requires support from agency leadership/Chaplain/	Requires clinical care



Compassion Fatigue

Compassion fatigue (CF) is a very real problem for emergency responders. When the calls for help and assistance become so frequent that responders begin to lose empathy and become numb to the suffering of others, CF has set in. It is important to separate compassion fatigue from burnout. Burnout is related to stress brought on by factors within the workplace, whereas compassion fatigue is brought on by the stress of helping others. While helping others is a core part of the professional role for emergency responders and healthcare workers, when that role is the primary stressor, compassion fatigue is likely the critical issue. When individuals have more stress about the conditions in which they work than they do about the role of responding to calls for assistance, burnout is likely the key issue. While there is considerable overlap, and an individual may experience both issues simultaneously, differentiating these two matters is important when determining what resources may be most beneficial for a colleague who needs assistance.

Preventing compassion fatigue is difficult. The following strategies may be helpful:

- As always, practice self-care when able (refer to handout on self-care).
- Maintain appropriate emotional boundaries.
 - Empathy and understanding are important when caring for others.
 - It is okay to not have all the answers—even helping a little is something.
 - Sometimes the help someone asks for is not the help they need.
 - Try to understand where individuals are coming from, appreciate what it means for their care, and realize that we must "meet people where they are."
- Seek support from others—and support those around you.
 - Identify relationships that are supportive and lean into them.
 - Make attempts to be supportive to those around you.
 - Empathize with those who are venting frustrations, but work hard not to get pulled into a "negativity spiral" where complaints and frustrations compound one another to the point the topic is unrecoverable.
- Identify stressors that can be resolved.
 - Even though this is cliché and "easier said than done," we should always seek to improve the conditions in which we work.
 - While workplace stressors are primarily related to burnout prevention, removing identifiable stressors from the work environment can aid in coping with and prevention of compassion fatigue.
 - Identify stressful elements of the work you do that are controllable and seek out ways to resolve the stressor.
 - Engage leadership about stressful elements at work and try to bring a workable solution to the table.
 - If you are in a leadership position, listen for solutions. Encourage coworkers to identify solutions to workplace stressors and, when possible, incorporate those solutions.
- Develop self-awareness.
 - Journal when possible.
 - Explore feelings of frustration and try to identify why they triggered frustration.
 - Seek out professional counseling.
- Maintain balance.
 - Leave work at work.
 - During your time off, make sure to be intentional in planning activities that reduce stress. This can help maintain a "light at the end of the tunnel."
 - Remember and celebrate success.



Personal Resilience Plan

	Thriving Under routine circumstances/ stress levels, I will take these actions to sustain and enhance my resilience:	Surviving When my stress levels are increased above normal, I will take these actions to support and maintain my resilience:	Struggling When my stress levels are threatening to overwhelm me, I will take these actions to regain my resilience:
Biological I will take these actions for my physical wellbeing and health.	 do cardio exercise 30 minutes/day moderate consumption of alcohol and caffeine make getting 8 hours of sleep each night a priority 	 devote at least 15 minutes/day for exercise monitor consumption of alcohol and caffeine unwind at least 30 minutes before going to sleep by silencing phone and not watching high action/violent programs 	 Example do some form of exercise to help unwind each day – yoga, tai-chi, taking a walk limit consumption of alcohol and caffeine before going to sleep, take a warm shower and silence phone to unwind
Psychological I will take these actions for my personal emotional and psychological health.	 Example meditate/pray 10 minutes/ day be aware of daily stressors 	at the end of work shift, reflect on the day and how it impacted emotional/ psychological health practice the 5-4-3-2-1	engaging external support through a therapist or chaplain
		exercise to clear head and reduce stress level	



Responding to Stress in the Zones of the Stress Continuum

The Thriving Zone includes basic self-care, like healthy eating, getting a good night's sleep, making time for fun and laughter, and getting regular exercise. It also includes cultivating resilience that can serve as a foundation for coping with future stress or even trauma. Responding to stress in the Thriving Zone involves ongoing and consistent self-care that can be supported by the following techniques:

- cardio exercise 30 minutes/day;
- moderate consumption of alcohol and caffeine;
- making 8 hours of sleep each night a priority;
- being aware of daily stressors;
- building in time to connect with family and/or friends;
- practicing open communication with colleagues;
- meditation/prayer;
- deep breathing or grounding techniques;
- yoga/progressive muscle relaxation; and
- relaxing activities, such as reading or listening to music.

Individuals in the Surviving Zone remain responsive to self-care, but may find themselves in a heightened state of distress. They may feel that they have lost focus, are anxious, or are feeling down. Through stress management techniques like deep breathing; prayer or meditation; listening to music; progressive muscle relaxation techniques; or talking to a partner, friend, or family member, EMS practitioners can build the resilience and skills needed to return to the Thriving Zone. The following are examples of Surviving Zone response techniques:

- devoting at least 15 minutes/day for exercise;
- monitoring consumption of alcohol and caffeine;
- unwinding for at least 30 minutes before going to sleep by silencing mobile phone and not watching high action/violent programs;
- finding a relaxing activity, such as watching a comedy movie or listening to calming music;
- at the end of the work shift, reflecting on the day and how it impacted your emotional/psychological health;
- practicing the 5-4-3-2-1 exercise to reduce stress levels;
- going for a nature walk;
- reaching out to members of your support network of family and/or friends; and
- sharing your personal reactions to stressors.

Individuals who are in the Struggling Zone may benefit from additional support and assistance. This could come in the form of granting the person leeway to take time off to rest or reassigning them to duties off the front line for a period of time. As an MHRO, you can encourage practitioners to talk to a chaplain or an EAP counselor to debrief a situation or develop a stress management plan. The following are examples of support resources that individuals in this zone can use:

- exercising to unwind each day such as yoga, tai-chi, taking a walk;
- limiting alcohol and caffeine the consumption;
- before going to sleep, take a warm shower and silence phone to unwind;
- sharing the situation with a support network of family and/or friends;
- limiting arguments with loved ones;
- considering engaging external support through an EAP counselor, therapist, or chaplain; and
- seeking leadership support.

As an MHRO, if you recognize that a peer's stress response is in the Crisis Zone, understand that they require clinical care. It will not be your responsibility to provide the care they need, but you will need to urgently guide them to clinical resources. These resources may involve group or individual therapy, medication, inpatient substance use treatment, or hospitalization. You will not need to figure out which one of these resources is best for your colleague (such as medication versus therapy, or both), but you will need to refer them to someone who can best make that assessment. If a colleague is suicidal, you will need to intervene by calling for immediate help. Crisis Zone response techniques include the following:

- recognizing the situation;
- keeping the individual safe pending actions;
- implementing your agency process for suicidal patients; and
- engaging an EAP/mental health professional.



Building Emotional Awareness

Four steps help build emotional awareness. The amount of focus and time an individual must spend on each of these steps will vary. In some cases, an individual may be very aware in one area and lacking in another. Identifying these steps will help reinforce areas that are well in hand and highlight areas where work can be done.

Step 1: Explore the stressors you encounter.

- Be intentional about setting aside uninterrupted time to consider what stressors exist in your personal and work life.
- Seek counsel from those in your support system. Often, stressors may not be obvious to an individual, but those around them may have insight into the stress they witness that person encountering.
- It may be helpful to write down stressors, so that you can further explore your response to those stressors in the next step.

Step 2: Examine your response to the stressors in your life, emotionally and physically.

- Feelings occur on a continuum and, often, as an individual becomes more stressed, their ability to cope decreases and feelings intensify. It can be helpful to examine how intense your feelings are towards a stressor when determining how large of a role it plays in your overall stress load.
- Below are a few examples of feelings that may be encountered when presented with a stressor. Feelings are listed in order of intensity.
 - Annoyance → Anger → Rage
 - Boredom → Disgust → Loathing
 - Concern → Sadness → Grief
 - Apprehension → Fear → Terror
- **Example**: A paramedic shows up to work and notices that the previous crew left their empty coffee cups in the cupholder of the ambulance. Normally this would be a simple annoyance to that individual. But in this case, he sees the trash and proceeds to curse and yell at his off-going colleagues and pushes one as they try to calm him down. This is an example of how reduced coping has led to an intensification of feelings in response to stress, beyond what would be considered an appropriate response.
- In some cases, stressors may produce intense physical feelings, out of proportion with the stressor being presented. Nausea, vomiting, and fatigue may be seen in response to intense stress when reduced coping is present.

Step 3: Understand how others react and respond to you.

- Take note of how relationships in your life change. If you see people pulling back, asking if you are okay, or otherwise changing their behavior, consider openly asking if they feel your behavior has changed.
- If you note a colleague is in distress and you are compelled to pull back or feel that your relationship is drifting, try to have safe and open communication with that individual. Make sure that any feedback provided is actionable and constructive.

Step 4: Practice mindfulness techniques.

- Mindfulness is intentional reflection on the current moment an honest examination of one's feelings in that moment.
- Mindfulness is difficult to achieve in the moment, as there is no shortage of distractions in public safety. Employers can help
 promote mindfulness by designating areas that are quiet and peaceful where employees can reflect when they have downtime or
 when they need to take a moment.
- Individuals can help themselves with mindfulness by practicing it often, even when not acutely stressed.

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- It is important to avoid the desire to judge, rationalize, or justify feelings in the moment—the goal is reflection and acknowledgement of the feelings, and examination of what led to those feelings.
- There are many free and paid resources online that provide mindfulness information and techniques.



Mindfulness Techniques

Technique	Setting	Method
Tactical Breathing	 This technique can be performed in a group or individually. Tactical breathing requires little planning and can be done as needed, whether the participant is in the field, at the station, or any other location they prefer. This technique is useful as an "in the moment" tool. It can also be used for planned decompression at the end of the day or end of a shift. 	 Inhale fully and then forcefully exhale, to completely empty your lungs. At the end of full exhalation, breath in a full breath (through your nose if possible) while counting out four seconds. At the end of the four-second inhalation, hold that breath while counting to four again. At the end of the four-second hold, exhale in a controlled manner while counting out four seconds. At the end of the four-second exhalation, hold the exhalation while counting to four again. At the end of the four-second hold, begin the cycle again by inhaling while counting out four seconds. Repeat the full inhale, hold, exhale, hold cycle for a total of four to eight repetitions (one to two minutes). This technique can be combined with guided imagery, visualizing the exhalation as a method of releasing, or letting go, the stress that has built up inside.
Stretching	 This technique can be performed in a group or Individually. Stretching will require some room, so may be better suited for use at the station or while at home. For crews that post away from a station, a parking lot or other safe area may also be used. 	 Gentle stretching of all muscle groups can be useful to combat fatigue and soreness that can develop over the course of a long shift. The emphasis should not be on "popping" joints, but rather on expanding and mobilizing muscle groups. Divide your body into four parts: Head and neck Gently roll the head and neck in a clockwise motion for two to four revolutions, then let you chin hang down to your chest and count to five. Gently roll the head and neck in a counter-clockwise motion for two to four revolutions, then allow your head to hang back, look toward the sky, and count to five. Upper extremities Close your fists and curl your arms from distal to proximal, tensing them all the way to your core. Hold the tension while counting to 10. Release the tension from proximal to distal in a controlled manner while counting to 10. Repeat this two times.

Technique	Setting	Method
		 Lower extremities Find something to lean against. Extend your right leg back and press your heel to the floor, stretching your calf. Hold for ten seconds. Switch to the left leg and repeat. Chest and back Stand with your feet shoulder width apart. Extend your arms to the side and then continue to pull them back, fully engaging the muscles in your upper back, as if opening your arms for a big hug. As you are extending your arms, breathe in as fully as you can. At the end of inhalation, pull your arms in front of you while exhaling, until your arms fully cross across your chest. Repeat this two to four times. Additional stretches or repetitions can be added and the exercises modified to fit the environment you are in. Emphasizing the muscles of the chest and back to fully expand the lungs can then be combined with a breathing exercise to increase wakefulness and combat fatigue.
Gazing Meditation	 This can be performed in a group or individually. This technique is flexible and can be performed on duty or in a planned fashion. Using this technique can help individuals work on consciously tuning out distractions and increasing focus. 	 Pick a fixed object in the distance and focus in on that object, making a conscious effort to mentally eliminate distractions in the peripheral vision. Set a timer for three to five minutes and focus on the object intently. It is okay to blink, but resist urges to look away from the object. Allow your mind to wander during this time. If negative thoughts become pervasive, try to transition your thinking to more enjoyable activities or moments.
Activities in Nature	 This technique can be used alone or in a group. This is a planned activity and has limited use while on duty. 	 Hiking in nature without technology or work intrusion has been shown to calm anxiety and stress. Engaging in activities around natural water sources such as rivers, waterfalls, beaches, and lakes and tuning in to the sounds around you can reduce anxiety levels. If participating in nature activities alone, make sure to inform a friend or family member of where you are going and when to expect you back.
Body Scan Meditation	 This technique requires a quiet area free of distractions. If there is a call room or bunk area at the station, this technique could be employed there. 	 Body scan meditation is a technique that involves intentionally focusing in on individual areas of your body and noting the sensations and feelings that each of those areas is experiencing. This technique is usually performed while lying down or sitting in a chair, with your back straight and feet flat on the ground. You will then be guided through a routine that pays attention to each area of your body and allows you to tune in to what your body is telling you in the moment. While this technique can be relaxing, the focus should be on tuning in to what your body is telling you, to gain deeper understanding of how stress and current experiences may be impacting individual areas of your body.

Technique	Setting	Method
		 When learning this technique, a script or guide will be required. A few links are provided below: https://youtu.be/QS2yDmWk0vs https://youtu.be/_DTmGtznab4 https://www.helpguide.org/meditations/body-scanmeditation.htm Many other free, online resources are available to guide you through this technique. A simple internet search for "body scan meditation" will provide multiple resources. Over time, you may learn to guide yourself through body scan meditation without a guide or script.
Cooking	This technique is limited to use in the home or in a station setting where meals are prepared at work.	 Many people find the act of cooking to be calming. Cooking can include an entire meal or be limited something as simple as a dessert or healthy snack. Cooking something that can be shared can be a helpful way to reduce stress and do something kind for your neighbors, coworkers, or family members. If you plan on using this technique, be cautious to make sure that cooking is something you can enjoy doing and avoid letting it become a responsibility or burden. If you routinely cook for your family or at the station as part of your day-to-day responsibilities, try to separate cooking for pleasure and routine cooking to maximize the benefit you can obtain from this technique.
Swimming	 This technique requires access to a swimming pool or other body of water. This is not a useful technique while on duty, but can be employed as part of a scheduled self-care routine. 	 Swimming requires breathing coordination, which can be helpful for stress and anxiety reduction. Swimming for fitness can be used as a stress-reduction technique that has the benefit of a low-impact aerobic fitness activity. Simply floating in a pool or body of water can be helpful for mindfulness, as the water naturally shuts out the surrounding sounds, and to maintain your buoyancy, you will have to consciously inhale and exhale.
Yoga	 Yoga can be performed in sessions as short as 5 minutes, or as a full 30- to 60-minute class. Short sessions can be useful while on duty as a break to reduce fatigue, increase focus, and reduce anxiety. 	 Yoga has three main components: Posture Breath control Meditation/mindfulness There are various styles of yoga with a variety of goals for each style. Some forms of yoga focus on fitness, while others focus on mindfulness and relaxation. This makes yoga a useful tool for most individuals, as they are likely to find a style that meets their needs. There are now apps that can guide participants through yoga sessions from their phone or TV, outside of a formal studio. This can make yoga useful while on duty.

Technique	Setting	Method
Physical Exercise	Physical exercise can be a planned part of your off- duty routine. In situations where you are at a station with workout equipment, you can incorporate this as part of your daily on shift routine also.	 Physical exercise can involve strength training, cardio, and other exercises. Partnering with other colleagues, friends, or family can help make this activity more fun and hold you accountable. The major benefit from this activity is seen when you engage in regular exercise over a period of weeks to months, slowly building it into your lifestyle. Many workplaces offer incentives for regular exercise and for meeting certain exercise goals throughout the year.



Self-Care Planner

Each month, pick one self-care activity from a list in the categories below. Resolve to complete that self- care activity for 30 days. If you like the activity, stick with it, and build on it with a new activity the next month. If the activity is not right for you, try to stick it out for the entire month, and then pick another activity from a new category the next month. At the end of the year, you will have hopefully built up a robust strategy for self-care that fits your needs.

Don't get discouraged. Self-care is hard. Not every activity will be right for you, but the process of trying these techniques and figuring out what works will help you maintain a self-care regimen tailored to your needs.

Physical	 Set a specified sleep time each day and stick to it. Eliminate screens and devices from your sleeping environment. Avoid "open-ended" sleeping and set an alarm, even on days you do not have to work. Make your bed after you wake up. Work out two times each week (or more if you already have a routine). Meal plan at least three meals each week.
Emotional	 Give someone a compliment each day for a month. Take a moment to express sincere gratitude to a friend, family member, or coworker each week. Schedule a time to "debrief" with a friend or coworker one time each week. Write one good thing you did or accomplished each day—no accomplishment is too small to list.
Psychological	 Take time to write at the end of each day—focus on what you did well, what challenges you had, and what you are looking forward to tomorrow. This can be as short as a few sentences. Plan to do a non-work-related activity or hobby at least four times in the month.
Spiritual	 Participate in a community group gathering one time each week. This can include yoga, organized religion, a volunteer organization, or other organized group. Practice mindful reflection such a guided imagery at the end of each day.
Interpersonal relationships	 Make concrete plans with friends or family at least four times in the month, and avoid cancelling. Participate in a new activity outside of your comfort zone to meet individuals you may not have otherwise met. Examine your relationships and determine if there are areas that can be improved. Identify positive relationships and use them as a model.
Professional	 Attend a professional conference. Obtain a new certification or skill rating. Mentor an individual interested in your career. Set aside designated time to completely disengage from work (e-mail off, no work discussion, etc.). Participate in a committee or process improvement project.



Support Systems

An individual's social support system is a core component of their individual resilience. When helping an individual examine what their social support system looks like, it can be helpful to approach it from two directions: maintenance of one's current support system and expansion of one's support system. These are described below:

Maintaining Current Support Systems			
Identify	 Social systems come in many forms. A few examples include Friends Family Professional colleagues Shared faith or special interest Identify which of these relationships are already present. Examine which relationships are supportive and lean into those areas. 		
Communicate	Intentional communication takes work. Establish "check in" times. Make efforts not to cancel when plans are made. Communication does not have to be exhaustive—a simple text, e-mail, or phone call is sufficient. Make an effort to reciprocate when others communicate with you and return communication.		
Appreciate	Thank those around you whom you find supportive. Make sure they know how much you value their friendship. Continue to support those who show appreciation for your friendship.		
Be available	Support systems should be mutually beneficial. Make sure that you are taking the time to support those who support you, and be available to them when they are going through tough times.		
Set boundaries	Maintaining boundaries is appropriate. If you feel that a relationship has strayed from being supportive, try to re-establish an appropriate boundary when appropriate, or create distance when re-establishing appropriate boundaries is not possible. Respect for other individuals' boundaries is also important. Be open to feedback when someone indicates you may be crossing a line, and make a good faith effort to stay within the confines of what they feel is appropriate for your friendship.		
Create distance	Be honest with yourself and with other individuals when the relationship is no longer working. Try to keep communication transparent, clear, and respectful. Creating distance when a relationship turns from supportive to potentially toxic does not have to be mean, but it should be clear. Distance does not always have to be permanent—friendships ebb and flow.		

Expanding Support Systems			
Start close to home	Make an effort to get to know your neighbors and those who live and work close to home. Check in and help them when appropriate, and allow them to check in and help you when possible.		
Professional networking	Tend to your professional support system. Collaboration with other individuals in similar professional roles can help expand your support system.		
Recreation	Joining an organized activity provides an opportunity to meet individuals outside of your professional and social circle that you may not have met otherwise.		

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Expanding Support Systems			
Volunteer	Find a cause that moves you, and volunteer in support of that cause. Meeting individuals who support similar causes can expand your social support system.		
Online	When direct interaction is limited or not possible, taking advantage of organized and scheduled online activities with supportive individuals or groups can be helpful. Effort should be made to make sure this time is structured in such a way to avoid simply scrolling through social media. Organized chats, meet-ups, etc. may be more beneficial than simply searching through or reading group posts or pages on social media.		



Mental Health Literacy

It can be helpful to think of mental health literacy like a three-legged stool. All three components must be present for it to stand on its own and be functional.

Recognition

- The signs and symptoms of behavioral and mental health illness should be openly discussed and refreshed with employees on a regular basis.
- An emphasis should be placed on teaching individuals to recognize concerning mental health signs within themselves and in those around them.
- A safe and accessible policy for reporting mental health concerns that an individual has about themselves or a coworker should be in place. This should be nonpunitive and anonymity should be available.

Recognition Knowledge Attitudes

Knowledge

- Individuals do not have to be experts in mental health to possess knowledge that can be helpful to themselves and those around them.
- Knowledge does not need to focus on distinct mental health disorders, rather it should focus on the following:
 - causes of mental health issues
 - risk factors
 - referral resources for treatment options, whether that be self-help, peer support or professional counseling
 - reliable resources for mental health information

Attitudes

- Managing the attitudes toward mental health that are present within an organization is important. There are two areas where attitudes should be addressed:
 - Attitudes towards individuals who have mental health issues should be managed. Any stigma that is present should be addressed and the culture of the organization should embrace recognition that mental health concerns are present among public safety workers and they do not represent weakness or deficiency on the part of individuals who are afflicted with mental health issues.
 - An attitude of support for those who seek help for mental health concerns should be emphasized. Any aspects of the
 workplace culture that may prevent or discourage an individual from seeking help or resources should be identified and
 corrected.



Resources for Calming and Mindfulness

Resource	Description	Link
Calm app	Calm is a company specializing in mindfulness, guided imagery, and sleep resources. They are most well known for their app, which includes meditation resources and "Sleep Stories." The app offers meditation and guided imagery for a variety of scenarios, including mindfulness, anxiety, difficulty sleeping, and increased focus. While the app is paid, they do have a discounted rate for businesses to purchase the product for their employees. Kaiser Permanente offers a free trial of some of their guided meditations free of charge. This can be a good place to start if someone would like to sample the app before they purchase.	Link for free guided meditation: https://healthy.kaiserpermanente .org/health- wellness/mental -health/tools- resources/anxiety/ calm-meditations Link for company website: https://www.calm.com/
The Mindfulness app	This app provides mediation and guided imagery resources with the added benefit of users being able to set reminders and select sessions lasting a specified amount of time. This can be convenient when only a set amount of time is available during the day.	Link for the app: https://themindfulnessapp.com/
Headspace	This app offers meditation and guided imagery resources in a staged format, encouraging users to master a level of meditation before advancing to the next level. This can be beneficial as it meets users where they are, not intimidating users with advanced meditation techniques before they have established a foundation to utilize those techniques.	Link for company website: https://www.headspace.com/
InsightTimer	InsightTimer offer meditation and guided imagery with an extensive library of free resources.	Link for the app: https://insighttimer.com/
YouTube	YouTube offers extensive user-submitted resources for breathing exercises, yoga, mindfulness, and meditation. While the quality and selection may be variable, the content is free and readily accessible for anyone with an internet connection. One disadvantage is that all resources are user submitted, so they vary in quality and validity. It may be helpful as the MHRO to catalogue specific videos or channels that you yourself or others within the organization have found helpful and keep a list of these on hand, or post a list for individuals to utilize as needed.	Link: https://www.youtube.com/
UCLA Mindful	Managed by the University of California at Los Angeles, this free app offers basic meditations in English and Spanish. It has a "Getting Started" section for beginners to mindfulness and meditation, and also offers articles and studies on the science of mindfulness.	Link: https://www.uclahealth.org /ucla-mindful

Resource	Description	Link
Health Minds Program app	This app was developed by neuroscientist Richard Davidson. It aims to integrate meditation training with neuroscience in order to improve individual well-being. The framework is divided into four pillars: Awareness, Insight, Connection, and Purpose. Each of these is further subdivided into additional parts and series. This program diverges from ones previously mentioned in that it is an overall structure, meant to be consumed as a whole, over a longer course of time. This may not be good for colleagues looking to quickly log on and be guided through an exercise, but for individuals who want to further explore mindfulness and take a "deep dive" into techniques, this offers an in-depth exploration, with a neuroscience basis.	Link: https://hminnovations.org /meditation-app
Mindful.org	Mindful is a website and print subscription that offers a larger overview of personal growth and well-being resources. This is likely not the best option for an individual looking for some quick tips; however, for the MHRO, this website and print materials can provide information on additional resources that may be helpful. It can be used to help build the MHRO's awareness of available resources and emerging trends. The website is often the top hit on Google when searching for mindfulness and meditation, so being aware of what is available on this resource can help when colleagues have been searching for resources on their own prior to approaching the MHRO for additional help.	Link: https://www.mindful.org/



Personal Resilience Plan Self-Care Techniques

Techniques for physical self-care include the following:

- Set a specified sleep time each day and stick to it.
- Eliminate screens and devices from your sleeping environment.
- Avoid "open-ended" sleeping and set an alarm, even on days you do not have to work.
- Make your bed after you wake up.
- Work out two times each week (or more if you already have a routine).
- Meal plan at least three meals each week.

Techniques for emotional self-care include the following:

- Give someone a compliment each day for a month.
- Take a moment to express sincere gratitude to a friend, family member, or coworker each week.
- Schedule a time to "debrief" with a friend or coworker one time each week.
- Write down one good thing you did or accomplished each day—no accomplishment is too small to list.

Techniques for psychological self-care include the following:

- Take time to write at the end of each day—focus on what you did well, what challenges you had, and what you are looking forward to tomorrow. This can be as short as a few sentences.
- Plan to do a non-work-related activity or hobby at least four times in the month.

Techniques for spiritual self-care include the following:

- Participate in a community group gathering one time each week. This can include yoga, organized religion, a volunteer organization, or other organized group.
- Practice mindful reflection, such a guided imagery, at the end of each day.

Techniques for professional self-care include the following:

- Attend a professional conference.
- Obtain a new certification or skill rating.
- Mentor an individual interested in your career.
- Set aside designated time to completely disengage from work (for example, turn e-mail off, no work discussion).
- Participate in a committee or process-improvement project.



Attributes of an Organizational Culture of Resilience

A comprehensive resilience strategy includes specific tactics for the agency to implement to ensure it can respond effectively to changing and stressful situations in a way that fulfills its mission while preserving future response capability. An organizational culture of resilience has five attributes.

Connection Among Employees

The first attribute of an organizational culture of resilience is that the organization offers opportunities for connection among its employees.

Social skills are associated with resilience, and the workplace is often a source of social support. Coworkers may also serve as an extended family. This may be particularly true in EMS, where teamwork is essential and EMS practitioners form strong bonds as a result of shared experiences—such as saving a life or dealing with death. The opportunity to build friendships at work can contribute to a sense of belonging and a shared mission, and may offer support in helping to face life's challenges.

What can employers do? Employers can offer opportunities for employees to socialize with one another, in a variety of settings, to strengthen friendships and create bonds.

Good Physical Health

The second attribute of an organizational culture of resilience is that the organization supports good physical health.

Physical health is associated with mental health and resilience. Getting sufficient sleep, nutrition, and exercise can ward off chronic illness; boost the mood; and provide protection from depression. People who are healthy physically are better able to face the emotional and psychological challenges of working in EMS.

What can employers do to help? Employers should establish policies and initiatives that promote a healthy lifestyle. Smoking cessation, weight-loss programs, opportunities to exercise, and fatigue mitigation are a few examples.

Fostering Positivity

The third attribute of an organizational culture of resilience is that the organization fosters positivity.

Positivity and optimism have been shown to bolster resilience. The work environment should be one in which employees receive recognition and appreciation for their work.

What can employers do to help? Employers should pay attention to the morale of their workforce. Employers can show employees that they are valued by providing positive feedback and recognition for a job well done. Initiatives should also provide opportunities for peer-to-peer recognition—the chance to offer recognition and praise benefits both the giver and the recipient.

Adapting to Change

The fourth attribute of an organizational culture of resilience is that the organization helps employees adapt to change.

Change can be very stressful, whether it's a new company owner or a new way of performing a procedure. Resilient people adapt well to change. As an employer, transparency and a commitment to keeping your employees informed will create an environment in which individuals are better able to accept change.

What can employers do to help? Provide support for employees in adapting to change by getting feedback before implementing a change, leading by example, clearly communicating the benefits of the change, and providing adequate training on implementing the change.

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Employees Offer Solutions

The fifth attribute of an organizational culture of resilience is that the organization empowers employees to develop solutions.

Research suggests that individuals with strong problem-solving skills tend to be more resilient. Having a sense of control over one's circumstances also boosts resilience.

What can employers do? Help employees develop their problem-solving skills. Challenge your employees to make meaningful contributions, set goals, and support those goals. Ask for their input and ideas for solving issues or improving conditions in the workplace, and then make sure employees know how their feedback is incorporated into new policies or procedures.



Active Listening

Active listening is a crucial element for interpersonal relations. It is the foundation for building mutual understanding and shared awareness. While there are many "takes" on active listening, the table below identifies four common elements, along with techniques and strategies to successfully employ those elements.

Attentio n	 Resolve to be attentive. Set aside other activities and distractions when possible. If you are unable to focus and maintain attention due to intrusions, schedule a time to reconvene, and block that time from intrusions. Make appropriate eye contact. Find the right space where distraction and intrusion will be minimized. Avoid conversational narcissism and shift response. It can be easy to slip into discussing how a topic affects you, the listener—avoid this while listening and consider incorporating it into your response if appropriate. Watch nonverbal cues that signal the emotions and intent of what is being discussed.
Understanding	 Give the person uninterrupted time to speak when practical. While it is important to allow uninterrupted time, it is also important to make sure an individual has the time to express all the points they would like to make, and sometimes they may need help or prompting. If an individual becomes repetitive or the conversation becomes circuitous, consider prompting them to discuss another point they would like to make. Phrases such as, "I can see how important that is to you. What other things might help me understand what you are trying to say?" or "I want to make sure you have time to discuss everything you came to talk about; what other things would you like to tell me about today?" Follow the individual's lead and resist the temptation to try and finish their story or help them find the words. Ask for clarification when something is not clear. Paraphrase and check understanding at appropriate intervals. Provide nonverbal cues that signal your understanding, or when appropriate, provide nonverbal cues that indicate you are having trouble following along.
Response or Reflection	 Resist the urge to plan your response as the individual is talking. Understand that a response does not always have to be a solution. Reflect on shared meaning or interest on the topic. Discuss possible next steps and follow up. Always make sure to thank an individual for taking the time to speak with you. Time is one of the most valuable things people have. Thanking someone for taking the time to discuss concerns with you is important. Make sure that responses are specific to the matter being discussed. Avoid the temptation to speak in generalities or platitudes.

Retention and Recall

- Summarize the points discussed, response, and next steps.
- Verify that your recall is correct.
- Ask for permission to take notes on key points you would like to take away from the conversation.
 - It is important to ask for permission when taking contemporaneous notes. It signals that you are actively listening.
 - Individuals may request that you do not take notes for various reasons. Respect that request when possible.
- Ask for permission before escalating any topics discussed.
- Ask the individual if they would like to remain anonymous or if they would like to have their name brought up when discussing the topic in the future.
- Be upfront if there may be any barriers to confidentiality and allow individuals to excuse themselves if that makes them uncomfortable.



Roadblocks to Listening

- Ordering
 - Let the person speaking lead the conversation.
- Warning
 - Warning someone about the consequences of their actions may result in them no longer talking openly to you.
- Giving advice
 - While well intentioned, giving advice takes away from the process of active listening.
- Persuading with logic
 - Often our emotions cloud our logical reasoning; what seems "logical" to you may not feel that way to the person in distress.
- Telling people what they should do
 - Your role is to just listen and offer support, even if the person does not take advantage of that support.
- Judging
 - When someone feels judged, they are not likely to keep talking openly.
- Agreeing
 - Remember, it is not your job to agree or disagree—just to listen.
- Labeling
 - Labeling someone's distress, such as telling someone they have symptoms of depression, moves you out of the role of active listener.
- Analyzing
 - It is not your job to analyze a peer or their level of distress—just to listen.
- Reassuring
 - Too much reassurance may be perceived as not hearing the person's distress.
- Questioning
 - A person feels how they feel; it will not support their resilience to question why they feel a certain way.
- Avoiding sensitive topics
 - It is okay to talk about difficult things.
- Oversharing your personal experiences
 - This isn't about you.



De-escalation Techniques

De-escalation techniques are used to reduce the possibility of violence in people who are experiencing severe anger or agitation. As an MHRO, you might engage with a colleague who is experiencing severe anger or agitation as a result of a difficult call, a work-related incident, or a family incident. You can apply several important communication techniques to help de-escalate a colleague.

- Use a calm and nonaggressive tone of voice.
- Identify yourself, and let the person know you are there to help.
- Speak slowly.
- Use short, direct, and clear sentences.
- Turn down your radio to avoid agitating the person.
- Look at the person but avoid frequent direct eye contact.
- Avoid touching the person without their permission.
- Tell the person you want to partner with them to help, and they can make decisions with you. In cases where the person does not have the capacity to make decisions, expressing that you want to partner with them to help is still appropriate. Avoid language that makes anyone feel forced or coerced.
- Avoid abrupt physical movements.
- Do not argue with or challenge the person.
- Avoid telling someone to "calm down" or threatening them if their behavior does not stop. The person may feel that they cannot control their behavior, and this tactic may escalate agitation and promote further risk.
- Avoid laughing or using facial expressions that may indicate sarcasm, such as eye rolling or smirking.
- Be honest. If a someone asks a question, answer as directly as possible.
- Avoid judgmental and blaming words and statements, such as, "If you didn't drink this would not happen," or "You are crazy right now."
- Give people physical space if they are agitated. Avoid physical confrontation until you are able to de-escalate.
- Consider how you would want to be communicated with if this were you having the mental health emergency.
- Always be a compassionate listener.

The following communication techniques are important to practice:

- Paraphrase: Use fewer words to repeat back what you have heard the person say.
- Summarize: Sum up what the person has said to you after listening for a period of time.
- Reflective listening: Restate what you hear and see, with a focus on how the person is feeling.
- Open-ended questions: Clarify what the person is thinking or feeling by asking questions that require more than a yes-or-no answer.
- I statements: Start your sentences with "I" to take ownership of what you have said and avoid putting the person on the defensive. Example, "I heard you say that you are scared of going to the addiction treatment center. I can understand why you would feel scared. I am here to help you feel less scared and I am going to be with you the entire way there."

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Mental Health Resilience Programs and Services

Agencies can build a culture of wellness and resilience by first recognizing the value of such a culture to their personnel and its impact on the overall effectiveness of their operations. Agencies can offer programs and services to build and strengthen individual, interpersonal, and agency resilience. The following are programs and services that agencies should consider offering.

Employee Assistance Program

An employee assistance program (EAP) should be staffed with counselors who understand the unique challenges of the EMS industry. Employers need to continually educate employees about EAP services, starting with the fact that counseling is confidential. Reinforce with employees that no reports come back to the organization from the EAP. EAPs should include the following services:

- a health risk assessment (HRA), which may include a self-administered questionnaire about health behaviors and clinical screenings (height, weight, blood pressure, blood glucose, and cholesterol)
- individual, group, or family mental health counseling
- education assistance
- legal help or financial counseling
- substance use and alcoholism treatment referral
- weight loss or nutrition coaching
- stress management programs
- smoking cessation assistance
- access to grief counselors

Peer Support Teams

Peer support teams are composed of EMS practitioners who have been trained to provide confidential peer-to-peer support during and after critical events, as well as for the daily challenges faced by EMS practitioners. Peer support teams do not provide therapy; rather, they are available to discuss personal and/or professional problems and current challenges. Peer support encourages practitioners to realize they are not alone, have a place to openly discuss vicarious trauma, and process personal and work- related stress.

Comprehensive Wellness Program

A comprehensive wellness program must be inclusive of mental health and should address the overall health and well-being of EMS practitioners. Prevention-focused programs help EMS personnel build resilience so that they can better cope with stress and other challenges, and which may be protective against depression or anxiety disorders. Psychological well-being and physical well-being are closely intertwined. Getting sufficient exercise, proper nutrition, and adequate sleep has been shown to prevent injuries, fight the development of chronic disease, and boost the mood. Yet long shifts and stressful work conditions all conspire against the physical health of EMS practitioners. EMS agencies can help EMS practitioners by implementing programs that encourage better physical health. EMS agencies can offer a variety of low-cost programs to encourage their personnel to get more physical activity, such as

- Provide an in-house fitness area with weights, exercise equipment, foam rollers, and medicine balls. Keep the area well-maintained to encourage usage.
- Partner with a fitness expert to offer your personnel individualized fitness programs.
- Approach local fitness centers, recreational centers, or YMCAs about offering free or discounted memberships to EMS
 practitioners. Remind them of the vital role that EMS provides in the community, the challenges EMS practitioners face in keeping
 fit due to time spent on the road and working long shifts, and how keeping EMS practitioners fit and healthy means they can
 continue to respond to and focus on patients in need of life-saving medical care.

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- Get creative! Invite employees for a group run in a forest preserve or state park or on the beach, or organize a group to participate in a fun run or 5K for charity.
- Good nutrition is also essential; it includes eating a diet that contains the vitamins and minerals that fuel the muscles and the brain and helps to maintain a healthy weight. Foster good nutrition habits in your agency by: keeping a bowl of fresh fruit on hand for employees
 - maintaining an employee food pantry, stocked via employee donations. If an employee is having difficulty making ends meet, they can confidentially tell a member of the leadership team, who will make the food pantry available.
 - subsidizing the cost of a weight management program



Actions to Develop an Agency Resilience Program

To help you get started in developing or strengthening your agency's mental health resilience program, here is a checklist of actions to take:

- In collaboration with your agency's management, create a Wellness and Resilience Steering Committee composed of EMS practitioners and management. The committee will take the lead on brainstorming, planning, achieving buy-in, and implementing wellness and resilience initiatives. If your EMS agency or fire department has a union, union leadership must be involved from the beginning. Others you may consider inviting to participate include registered dietitians, exercise physiologists, health educators, and mental health counselors.
- Define your agency's culture of wellness and resilience. This is an opportunity to affirm your agency's commitment to the employees' mental, emotional, and physical health. Your wellness and resilience steering committee can take the lead on creating this vision for wellness and resilience. You can use NAEMT's EMS Culture of Personal Resilience and Well-Being position statement as a starting point. Download the statement here.
- Create a culture of wellness and resilience policy. Your policy (or policies) should define what the agency will offer to employees, and what employees are expected to do in return. If you have a collective bargaining agreement, the policy may need to become part of it.
- Identify and prioritize innovative practices for your agency. Survey your colleagues to identify the issues they are most concerned about, what activities or initiatives they would be most likely to participate in, and what they would value the most.
- Work with your agency's management to budget for implementation of new practices. Wellness and resilience are broad concepts that can encompass many levels of benefits and programming. By having agency leadership involved, you can determine how much money is available to build or sustain programs and resources.
- Develop relationships to offset costs for implementing your new practices. EMS provides an essential service to the public. Ask local businesses, healthcare providers, and philanthropic and service organizations to help you in taking care of the people who take care of them.
- Discounts, special offers, donations, and grants can offset costs for your wellness and resilience program.
- Ask your EMS practitioners for feedback. Through surveys, focus groups, or task forces, learn about what is working, what employees value the most, and what programs and services they are utilizing the most.
- Document progress. There are many ways to potentially measure the impact of wellness and resilience programs. Job satisfaction surveys, sick day use, attrition rates, drug tests, worker's comp payments, and health insurance costs are a few of them.



Ideas for Community Engagement

Engage your community—your community has valuable resources to help your agency. To develop a mental health resilience program, build on existing relationships (such as with your insurance company) and create new ones, such as with wellness vendors, local healthcare providers, and community groups, to provide resources to employees at little to no cost. Local businesses and professionals may be more willing to participate.

- College and universities Ask a local college or university if they want to partner with you to design, collect data, and measure the results of a wellness initiative.
- Health insurer See what your health insurance provider has to offer as far as smoking cessation, weight loss, or other health and wellness services.
- Fitness centers Reach out to local fitness centers, YMCAs, or recreational centers for discounted memberships for employees.
- Trainers and instructors Personal trainers and yoga instructors may be willing to offer free or discounted sessions to EMS
 practitioners.
- Healthcare providers Contact chiropractors and physical therapists to ask if they would offer discounted sessions for your personnel.
- Mental health professionals Identify counselors, therapists, psychologists, or psychiatrists who would welcome referrals. Mental health professionals with experience working with EMS professionals are always preferred. EMS practitioners may be more willing to open up to those who understand the nature of their job and may benefit more if they don't need to explain the unique challenges of working in EMS. Experienced, credentialed counselors and therapists should be able to look at the whole person, taking into account past traumas experienced outside of work, mental health disorders that may have predated their EMS career, relationship dynamics, financial stressors, and other factors, and help the individual work through issues and develop tools to cope. Word-of-mouth recommendations, online reviews, and calling therapists in advance to get a sense of their approach and interest in treating EMS professionals can help you identify professionals who would be a good fit for your agency. Mental health professionals may be willing to discount fees if you let them know that you're developing a list of select providers to support local agency personnel.
- Financial advisors Financial advisors may also be willing to provide a consultation free of charge, or serve as a resource for people with financial questions and concerns.



Website Resource Links

Guide for Developing an EMS Agency Safety Program

Implementation Guide for Fatigue Risk Management Guidelines for Emergency Medical Services

Agency Just Culture Statement with Resources

Sample EMS Week Initiatives

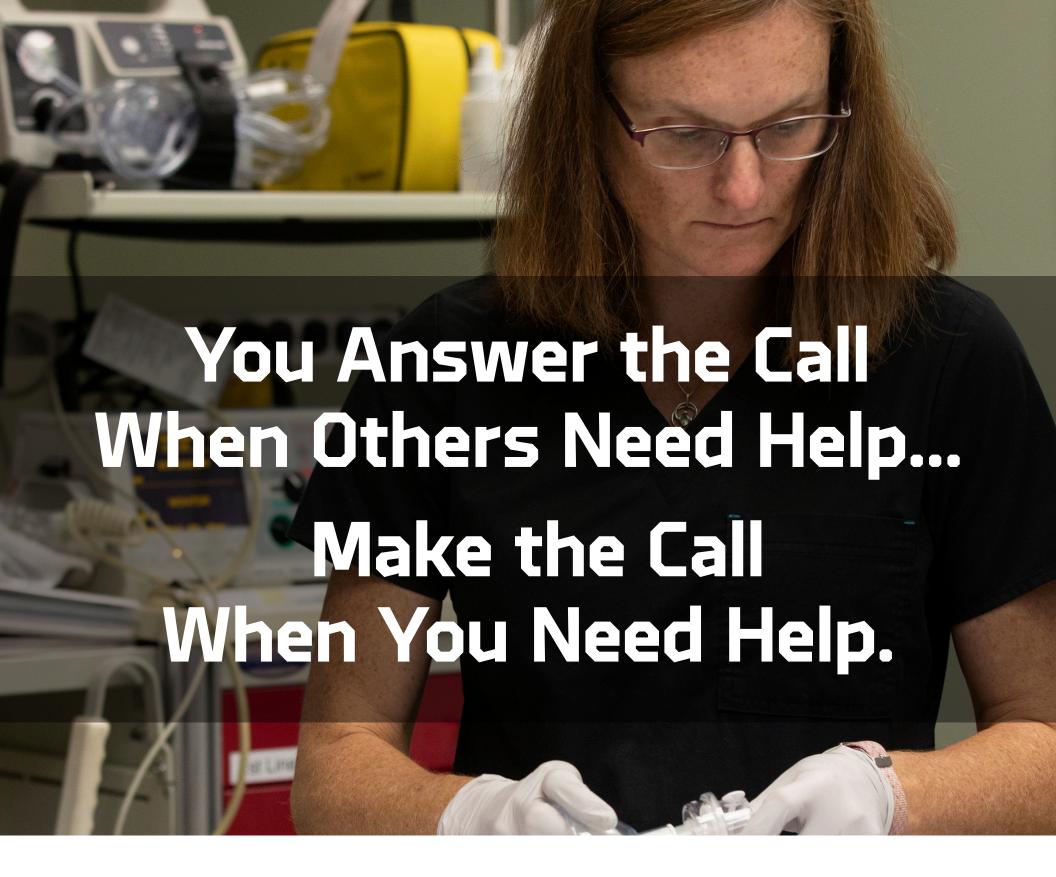
Ways to Raise Public Awareness of EMS in Your Community

NAEMT's EMS Culture of Personal Resilience and Well-Being Position Statement



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SIGNS YOU OR A BUDDY NEED HELP:

- Changes in Sleep
- Drinking More
- · Reckless Behavior
- · Getting Affairs in Order
- Making a Plan to Kill/Hurt Yourself
- Increased Anger or Anxiety
- Withdrawing
- Hopelessness
- Sudden Mood Changes
- · Loss of Interest in Activities
- Isolation
- No Sense of Purpose

SUICIDE IS PREVENTABLE:

Q = Question. Don't be afraid to ask someone if they need help or if they are feeling suicidal.

P = Persuade. Persuade the individual to get help. Seeking help is a sign of strength, not of weakness.

R = Refer. Refer the person to resources. It's okay to give someone who needs help the Suicide Prevention Lifeline number, the number to a therapist or connect them to a member of the clergy.

The key is to help that individual actually connect with a resource to help them.

You can learn more about QPR training here. Other training on suicide prevention includes Mental Health First Aid, Living Works Suicide Prevention training, and others. The best source of information on suicide prevention information and training can be found through the <a href="https://example.com/suicide/su

Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1-800-272-TALK (8255)

